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REAGAN SAYS U.S. IS ACTING LEGALLY OVER NICARAGUANS

'We Are Not Doing Anything,'
He Says, to Try to Oust the
Sandinist Government

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WASHINGTON, April 14 — President Reagan today denied charges that the United States was violating the law by providing covert aid to rebels dedicated to overthrowing the Nicaraguan Government.

"We are not doing anything to try and overthrow the Nicaraguan Government," the President said at a brief White House news conference. In defending his policy, Mr. Reagan complained that his powers under the Con-

stitution had been unduly restricted by the Boland Amendment, which bans covert aid to guerrillas seeking to oust the Sandinist Government in Nicaragua.

Denouncing Nicaragua as a Marxist Government that wants to overthrow El Salvador, the President added: "What I might personally wish, or what our Government might wish, still would not justify us violating the law of the land."

'We Are Complying With the Law'

On Wednesday, the author of the restrictive amendment, Representative Edward P. Boland, chairman of the House Intelligence Committee, said "the evidence is very strong" that the Reagan Administration was violating the law.

"We are complying with the law," the President declared today in response. He declined, however, to be specific about the exact nature of United States aid along the Honduran border where the rebels are infiltrating Nicaragua.

"I could not and would not talk about such things," he said, adding: "Anything that we're doing in that area is simply trying to interdict the supply

lines which are supplying the guerrillas in El Salvador."

At the United Nations, diplomats said Nicaragua had indicated a possible softening of position in saying that it would be willing to discuss regional aspects of the dispute but that its first priority remained immediate concerns about Honduras.

In fielding questions about Mr. Boland's charge, President Reagan smilingly questioned whether he and other critics had been "misled" by various news accounts from Central America regarding United States aid to the Nicaraguan rebels.

Asked about the American public's reaction, Mr. Reagan said: "I think that when they pay a little more attention to this, they're going to find out we're not violating the law."

Asked about assertions from Administration officials that Cuba or the Soviet Union might introduce new aircraft or even Cuban troops into the Nicaragua dispute, the President at first declined to comment.

"I only know that that possibility does exist because the Soviet Union, by way of Cuba, has been engaged already," he then said. "Both of them openly hailed Nicaragua as the first Communist country on the mainland of the Western Hemisphere," he added.

Mr. Boland's charge of covert Administration aid was supported Wednesday by eight members of a fact-finding group that recently returned from the area. The group, including two House members, contended that the Administration was "deeply involved" in helping the guerrillas.

The President, however, noted that Senator Barry Goldwater, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he had found no violations of "the letter or the spirit of the law" by the Central Intelligence Agency.

"We are complying with the law — the Boland Amendment, which is the law," the President declared.

The Administration's policy in Central America has been under growing Congressional criticism. But the President called for a clearer "perspective" about the struggle in Latin America.

"Nicaragua today has created the biggest military force in all of Central America and large parts of South America," he said, "an army of some 25,000 backed by a militia of 50,000, armed with Soviet weapons that consist of heavy-duty tanks, an air force, helicopter gunships, fighter planes, bombers and so forth."

"I think that people should understand some of these things," Mr. Reagan said, looking forth to television cameras broadcasting his remarks, "and ask themselves what is the need for them having the biggest army in all of the region."